Overview

This course will explore the transformation of American cities from the mid-twentieth century to today through the lens of gentrification and uneven urban development. In public discourse gentrification is most widely known as a form of urban revitalization that entails the movement of affluent people into impoverished urban areas and the displacement of existing lower-income residents from their homes and neighborhoods. Some see this as a ‘natural’ evolution in cities that has positive consequences for neighborhood improvement.

Alternatively, activists and others suggest that gentrification is not ‘natural’ pointing towards the role of public and private organizations in promoting neighborhood change that often has negative consequences associated with housing affordability and different forms of physical, political and cultural displacements. In addition, critical urban scholars suggest that gentrification is a global phenomenon that has resulted in the reproduction of socially segregated cities around the world. We will examine all of these issues with the goal of identifying alternative and more equitable forms of urban development that
embody the slogan, “cities for people, not for profit.”

In this course students will learn: 1) multiple theoretical perspectives on the ways in which cities have developed in the U.S. since the mid-twentieth century; 2) how government policies and programs shape cities; 3) how the real estate and banking industries shape cities; 4) how activists and social movements have resisted urban development processes associated with the production of inequality, as well as the visions these groups put forth for a more just city; 6) how race, class, gender have intersected with urban development initiatives; and, 7) how all of the aforementioned are connected to the main theme of the course, gentrification.

The readings for the course will begin with a historical overview of urban redevelopment during the twentieth century that created the types of neighborhoods that are now being gentrified. This will entail a close examination of social segregation as it relates to race and class. The bulk of the readings will focus on gentrification in the U.S., but we will also cover material on different cities across the globe in order to understand how gentrification occurs in diverse ways that cannot be easily fit into the U.S. and North-Atlantic models of this phenomenon. We will engage in discussing multiple case studies to illuminate the theoretical material on gentrification, and apply our growing knowledge through the practice of research in Nashville.

In addition to weekly discussions we will have the opportunity to actually study urban development and gentrification through class activities including photo-essays on gentrification in different neighborhoods, data analysis using a large-scale survey and interviews with Nashville residents and leaders. Further, we will have local and national speakers join us to discuss their research, policy work, and activism as it relates to the course theme of gentrification.

**Gentrification & Uneven Development**

Metropolitan areas across the country are experiencing rising rents that are far outpacing real wage increases for many Americans, a dynamic that has resulted in what many have termed a housing affordability crisis for a growing number of people (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2015). In 2015, the Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS) at Harvard University released its *State of the Nation’s Housing* report concluding that U.S. cities are progressively transforming in a manner that is displacing low to moderate income households from being able remain in, or move to, many neighborhoods without being deeply “housing cost burdened” (JCHS, 2015).

That is, urban areas that were once accessible to working class and poor populations are now being redeveloped into areas of increasing affluence, while other parts of cities are experiencing increasing migrations of people living in poverty, thus highlighting the spatial interconnectedness of urban restructuring and its effects.

This uneven development of the city has been conceptualized by geographers and others as being intimately tied to capitalist accumulation through processes of gentrification. Drawing on a range of studies gentrification may be defined as creating economic development through the restructuring of poor, innercity neighborhoods in order to attract affluent populations that can service more debt and consume high-value goods and services, thus, providing what David Harvey (1978, 2003) refers to as a spatial fix for capital (i.e., producing locations for it to gain presence and create value through repeated investments to temporarily stave off overaccumulation crises) (Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2012; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2013; Smith, 2002; Smith, 1996; Smith & Williams, 1986). In essence, housing and the production of urban space (i.e., place-making) are linked to multiple goal sets based upon the perspective of the actors involved.

On the one hand housing and neighborhoods represent use value for the social reproduction of people’s needs (i.e., dwelling and shelter), and at the
same time are commodities that link particular locales to (global) flows of capital providing economic development opportunities for a myriad of local and not-so-local actors. In this context, crises of housing affordability are a result of state-planned activities aimed at creating value in place for the purposes of urban economic development often times at the expense of lower-income populations who have to deal with the consequences of increasing rents (Slater, 2006). This is what is meant when Smith (2002) notes that gentrification has become a globalized and generalized as a strategy for state-led/assisted economic development.

In the U.S. context, gentrification has been made possible through uneven urban development associated with prior rounds of capitalist investment and disinvestment in cities during the mid-twentieth century, aided by an interventionist state implementing public policies that promoted suburbanization, residential racial segregation, as well as urban renewal and highway projects disproportionately having a negative impact on low-income, black neighborhoods (Gotham, 2002).

The present-day legacy of these institutionalized practices are urban spaces frequently identified by policymakers, planners, and city officials as areas of urban blight and concentrated poverty in need of government interventions (i.e., policies, programs, and resources) to encourage speculative capital investment and more comprehensive, market-driven neighborhood revitalization. Rather than explicitly promoting gentrification per se – as it has acquired negative connotations in certain publics (Slater, 2014) – its incorporation into neighborhood development policy is typically recoded by state agencies as creating socially mixed neighborhoods for all income groups (Bridge, Butler & Lees, 2012).

The policy contention is that moderate and low-income residents living in impoverished neighborhoods gain access to a suite of opportunities and neighborhood-based benefits by being integrated into middle-class society, and that this is not the same as gentrification. Cast through this spatial policy discourse, proponents of drawing more affluent populations to inner city neighborhoods elide the class-based antagonisms that constitute gentrification (Davidson, 2012).

In numerous cases the supposed emancipatory potential of social mixing by means of regulated gentrification has faltered resulting in neighborhood restructuring that is associated with experiences of physical, political and cultural displacement for existing residents who are forced to move due to lack of affordable housing, choose to leave the area, or those who stay put and have to navigate a rapidly shifting neighborhood landscape and the everyday phenomenological consequences of such movement (Atkinson, 2015; Davidson, 2009; Fraser, 2004; Hwang, 2015, Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Hyra, 2014; Martin, 2003).

The ways in which neighborhood residents can be displaced are manifold, and they need to be treated as potentially interrelated, as losing one’s sense of place and belonging may very well lead to exiting a neighborhood under duress. In addition, we do not have a well-developed sense of how the witnessing, anticipation or experiences of displacement(s) produces politics, that is, organized efforts that mobilize against discursive and material place-making practices that marginalize low-income, minority populations while promoting gentrification. Overall, uneven urban development and gentrification provide a unique lens through which we can understand the city as well as the processes and people that constitute it.

**Course Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of multiple theoretical perspectives on the city (and some perspectives that are broader but applied to understand the urban);

2. Define, in multiple ways, the processes that constitute the city, its production, and the ways in which social (in)justices are reproduced (i.e., urban (re)development and neighborhood change in all of its complexity, contradictions, and paradoxes);
3. Understand, in detail, the actors (state, market, society sectors) and ideological/theoretical perspectives that are both driving and resisting these processes;

4. Understand the impact that urban public policy has had on cities throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and how these are connected to issues of social justice.

**Attendance**
This class will be conducted with a focus on in-class discussions and activities. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. You can miss up to two classes throughout the semester without penalty, but you must turn in assignments ahead of time and arrange to get notes from a colleague. Your final grade will go down by 5 points (out of 100) for each additional class missed.

**Reading**
Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled. You must bring your book or copies of the readings to each class. See the course outline below for details on weekly readings.

**Charitable Criticism**
A charitable read of a text mirrors the generosity, respect, and rigorous criticism that is, I believe, necessary for social ethics and public discourse. This process treats the text as a colleague in the room with whom we engage with dignity and accountability. I hope intentionally engaging texts will also help us engage one another constructively and generatively. Here’s one way to think through the process that moves from apprehension to appreciation to internal criticism and finally external criticism.

**I. Apprehension**

A. What are the author’s goals? Who are her target audiences and how does that impact the form and content of her argument?

B. What is the dominant claim, a thesis that encapsulates the argument? How is it supported by other claims, with what forms of evidence/reasoning?

C. What are the other major claims of her argument and how does she support them? [Focus here on the supporting walls of her house, the dominant melodies of her song, i.e. the essential pieces of her argument.]

**II. Appreciation**

A. What are the most creative, compelling, and/or effective of the major claims of the author? Why (e.g. use of certain authoritative sources, quality of narrative, social science focus, historical analysis, etc.)?

B. What makes you think more deeply in this text or illumines reality in helpful or provocative ways? Why?

**III. Internal Criticism**

A. Which of her major claims are least effective?

B. Why are they not effective? E.g. problems in logic, historical or social scientific accuracy, inconsistent method, etc.

C. Does the weakness of one or more of the claims undo the overall argument? [Jenga piece]

**IV. External Criticism**

A. What’s left out of this argument that needs to be there?

B. Why is it left out? E.g. assumptions in methodology, epistemology, theology, audience, word limit (should it displace another argument?), etc.

C. Who or what would help her see these other dimensions necessary to the argument? E.g. additional theoretical, theological, social-scientific tools, etc.
Participation Through communication, ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note-taking, and question-asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning. An effective participant is not someone who simply talks frequently, but someone who reliably offers thoughtful insights that help others to learn.

Technology Laptop computers and other portable technologies should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to play games, answer email, surf the web, answer cell phones, text message, or engage in other non-class-related activities. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break this rule by 5 points (out of 100) for each transgression.

Academic Honesty In order to avoid plagiarism, your assignments must provide full citations for all references: direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted in this course. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review the Honor Code for complete guidelines on academic honesty: http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/.

ESL/LD Students Course requirements can be adjusted to serve the needs and capabilities of ESL and LD students. Please speak with the professor during the first two weeks of class to make arrangements. Students may be advised to attend additional sessions during the professor’s office hours so they can draw comparable value from the course.

Grading & Assignments

Discussion Circle & Reading Worksheet 20%
Exams (3) 60%
Final Paper (1) 20%

Discussion Circle & Reading Worksheet Every class we will go around the circle and you will need to have a discussion question and initial response ready to present to class. In addition, for chosen readings there will be a google doc worksheet that you will need to complete and submit. You will find the links to the google doc worksheets under each reading worksheet. Click on the link, which will be located next to the reading, fill it out and submit. It would be good for you to have access to these for class discussion as well.

Exams There will be three exams throughout the semester. These will contain short answer and one essay question. These will be on Weeks, 6, 11, and 15.

Final Paper You will be able choose a topic related to urban development and gentrification and write a 20-page paper.


Gender-Fair Language Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequalities. Imprecise language also signifies un-interrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like “mankind” or “men” when referring to people in general; alternate between “she” and “he” instead of always using “he,” or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use “they” or “them” and avoid the problem altogether.

Class Schedule

Week 1 (August 30)
Introduction: What’s happening this semester? From these readings you need to be able to define gentrification, identify some issues that have been debated about it, and begin to link it to political-economic shifts that have occurred since the 1970s.


Worksheet #1

Week 2 (September 6)
What has created the neighborhoods that are now gentrifying? This is a look at development during the twentieth century with a focus on class and racial dynamics.


Worksheet #2


Worksheet #3


Worksheet #4

Week 3 (September 13)
How does ideology express itself in urban public policy? You need to be able to articulate an understanding of the emergence of neoliberal urban policies and the state-market-society relations that it engenders.


Worksheet #6


Worksheet #5

Week 4 (September 20)
Community development has typically been associated with providing for the needs of low-income populations through activities such as neighborhood improvement. Given the neoliberal urban policy context you read about last week we are introducing community development to the mix.


Worksheet #7


Worksheet #8

Week 5 (September 27)
Neighborhood-based initiatives not only play out in low-income urban areas but also in public housing developments. You need to be able to explain the transformation of public housing over the twentieth century with particular emphasis on the current trend of building mixed-income housing. Focus on ideology as well as the history of mixed-income housing.


Worksheet #9


Worksheet #10
Week Six (October 4)
This week we will be focusing on a case study of a mixed-income housing planning process in Nashville, Tennessee. Think about the issues discussed in, Why do we want mixed-income housing and neighborhoods?” and think about strategies that you would suggest in making this project successful. In other words, what issues need to be considered and addressed before, during and after the redevelopment?


Worksheet #11

Nashville’s Cayce Place Turning Into Mixed-Income Housing - http://wkrn.com/2015/06/25/602m-project-begins-to-turn-cayce-place-into-mixed-income-community/


Exam #1
Week Seven (October 11)
As with mixed-income housing, there are other dominant ideologies, policies and initiatives to create economic growth in cities. One of these is drawing new economy workers into the city. One way that this has been conceptualized is bring the “creative class” back to the city. You need to understand this paradigm and be able to explain it, as well as provide a critique.


Week #12
Week Eight (October 18)
This next half of the semester we will cover five weeks on gentrification, and then we will cover material on community development strategies and policies to mitigate it. We will also read material on anti-gentrification movements.

For this week let’s remember what we discussed during week 1 and deepen our historical understanding of gentrification. You should be able to give a history of the phases of gentrification for this week.


Week Nine (October 25)
This week we drill down more on consumption versus production side explanations for gentrification. Be ready to tell the difference and speak to Neil Smith’s work.


Worksheet #13


Week Ten (November 1)
This week we discover the evolution of gentrification. Be prepared to further delineate how theorization on gentrification has evolved.


Worksheet #14

Week Eleven (November 8)
This week we focus on the idea of displacement. Typically, gentrification is said to cause physical displacement (the class remake of a neighborhood in Euclidean terms of absolute space). Yet, other forms of displacement occur like political and cultural, even for populations of low-income residents that get to stay in the neighborhood. Be prepared to discuss this theme in detail.


Worksheet #15


**Worksheet #16**


**Exam #2**

**Week Twelve (November 15)**
This week we will be contextualizing gentrification as a process that is all about having more affluent people consume consumer landscape in addition to simly housing. Be prepared to discuss the ways in which commercial districts and neighborhoods are important sites for gentrification.


**Worksheet #17**


**Week Thirteen (November 22)**
This week we will be covering anti-gentrification movements and the struggles they face. Be prepared to discuss what strategies groups use to confront gentrification.


**Worksheet #18**

**Week Fourteen (November 29)**
This last week we cover material on what it means to have equitable and just urban development. Prepared to situate your discussion based on Defilippis’ notion of community control, and then note the different strategies that can be used to produce affordable housing in the Thurber piece.


**Worksheet #19**

Week 15 (December 6)
This last week we cover material on what it means to envision a just city whereby all populations can thrive. Can this be done in a capitalist society? Be prepared to respond to this question, as well as what the role of utopian thought might provide us.


Worksheet #20

Exam 3

Extra